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LATVIA AND WORLD BANK SIGN $4 MILLION LOAN AGREEMENT. Latvian Ambassador to the US Ojars Kalnins and the World Bank's European and Central Asian Region Acting Vice-President Basil Kavalsky signed a $4 million loan agreement on 9 January in Washington, BNS reported on13 January. The loan, along with a Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation loan and Swedish and Finnish government grants, will finance the largest environmental protection project in Latvia, the development of the Kurzeme coastal area. The project also aims to decrease untreated or partially treated sewage inflow into the Baltic Sea. The technical part of the project, whose implementation will be completed by September 1999, will be coordinated from Latvia's side by the Liepaja Water Supply and Sewage enterprise. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.

LATVIAN FOREIGN MINISTER IN WASHINGTON. Valdis Birkavs on 12 January held talks with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher on topics including the expansion of NATO and the situation in Chechnya, BNS reported on13 January. On that day, Birkavs and US trade representative Mickey Kantor signed an agreement on mutual investment protection. In meetings with two deputy secretaries of state and representatives of the National Security Council, Latvian officials discussed the dismantling of the Russian radar station at Skrunda, US assistance in forming Latvia's export control system, bilateral cooperation and US technical assistance projects. Birkavs also met with several Republican Senators. He will return to Riga on 17 January, making a one-day visit to Helsinki en route. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.

NEW RUSSIAN CHECKPOINTS WITH LATVIA AND ESTONIA. Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Economic Relations Oleg Davydov on 12 January arrived in Pskov to visit three new border checkpoints with Latvia (at Ubylinka and Burachki) and Estonia (at Kunichina Gora), Interfax reports. The three points should have started functioning at the end of 1994, but their construction was delayed because promised state funds were not received. Davydov attended the opening ceremonies of the Ubylinka post on 12 January and of the Kunichina Gora post the following day. The new posts increase the number of highway checkpoints between Russia and Latvia and Estonia from four to seven and are expected to help strengthen the fight against smuggling. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.